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## United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs

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# United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs

by Zach Wall [ Mine Action Information Center ]



The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs is the global community's chief authority on the issues of weapons reduction. Among its responsibilities UNODA acts as the U.N. Secretary-General's liaison in fulfilling the obligations established by both the Ottawa Convention<sup>1</sup> and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.<sup>2</sup> The Office for Disarmament Affairs' Geneva branch oversees these activities and is responsible—in accordance with the Ottawa Convention—for collecting Article 7 reports, maintaining the list of Article 8 experts and organizing meetings of States Parties, as well as organizing meetings pertaining to the CCW.<sup>3</sup>

Headquartered in New York, and with one branch in Geneva, UNODA also operates regional centers in Africa, South America and Asia.

## Gender and Disarmament

For the last decade, the UNODA has been committed to the incorporation of gender dimensions into its work. A 1997 letter to all heads of departments by the U.N. Secretary-General stated that the process of gender mainstreaming is "the responsibility of us all and not just gender experts or isolated units," and called specifically for reports on gender dimensions in all respective areas of work, along with policy recommendations and concrete strategies for gender mainstreaming.<sup>5</sup> Following this directive and a series of other mandates set forth by the United Nations, UNODA published *Briefing Notes on Gender Perspectives on Disarmament* in 2001, which was followed by a gender mainstreaming action plan two years later.

*Briefing Notes on Gender Perspectives on Disarmament*, published in collaboration with the Office of the Special Adviser of Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, assesses the relevance of gender dimensions in disarmament issues and identifies strategic implications for promoting gender equality and disarmament.<sup>5</sup> In a speech on 14 March 2001, then Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs Jayantha Dhanapala said of this collaborative effort: "For too many years, the two noble causes of disarmament and gender equality have been pursued on separate but parallel tracks."<sup>6</sup>

In 2003, the U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs released its *Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan*, which synthesized the research compiled for the Briefing Notes with strategies for effective implementation of gender mainstreaming in the field. The Action Plan's purpose was "to facilitate progress on disarmament ... through the integration of gender insights into disarmaments debates, decision-making and actions, and through more equitable participation by women in decision-making." It also identified four sub-goals:

1. To examine the linkages between gender equality and disarmament promotion;
2. To enhance departmental capacity to incorporate gender perspectives into its work;
3. To advocate the importance of gender perspectives on disarmament; and,
4. To reach out to gender equality activists, women's organizations and others to engage in the continuing dialogue on disarmament issues.<sup>7</sup>

Former Under-Secretary-General Nobuyasu Abe reflected on the department's accomplishments during the "Panel on Women, Weapons of Mass Destruction and Preventing War," noting that the implementation of the Action Plan had been met with initial success, and that evidence of the UNODA's gender mainstreaming efforts was apparent in its activities worldwide.<sup>8</sup>

**International Women's Day Disarmament Seminar.** In March 2008, UNODA-Geneva Director Tim Caughley spoke on behalf of UNODA during the International Women's Day Disarmament Seminar "At what cost? Resolution 1325, Wars, Weapons & Conflict." The annual conference, organized by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, highlights the issues of women's empowerment and gender equality through weapons reduction, peace and sustainable development. The focus of the 2008 seminar was the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security—the first of its kind to specifically examine the impact of armed conflict on women and, in turn, women's efforts toward conflict resolution.<sup>9</sup>

In his opening remarks, Caughley reaffirmed the commitment of the UNODA to advancing gender equality, saying that, although there has

been significant progress in recent years, "more needs to be done to fully integrate women and gender perspectives into all aspects of security and disarmament work around the globe."<sup>10</sup>

Also in March 2008, UNODA in New York co-organized with International Action Network on Small Arms a seminar on women and guns, which was presented as the start of a structural cooperation between UNODA and IANSA on gender issues related to small arms.

## Conclusion

The U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs' commitment to the promotion of the mutual interests of gender equality and disarmament is evident in its weapons-reduction initiatives, from small arms and light weapons to weapons of mass destruction. *Briefing Notes on Gender Perspectives* and *Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan* provide a preliminary framework from which parties with a vested interest in peace can benefit. ♦

See Endnotes, page 113



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